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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
18 September 1966

State Department review
completed

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HIGHLIGHTS

Thich Tri Quang again denounced the Thieu-Ky government and US policy in South Vietnam at the conclusion of his 100-day hunger strike. [REDACTED]

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I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: US Marines report contact with Communist forces as Operations PRAIRIE and DECK HOUSE IV continued in northernmost Quang Tri Province over the weekend (Para. 1). Twelve Viet Cong were killed and two sampans sunk by American soldiers participating in Operation BATON ROUGE (Para. 2). Ten Americans were killed yesterday when a battalion-size enemy force attacked a bivouac area (Para. 3). Operation DANBURY has started in Binh Duong Province (Para. 4). Operation GOLDEN FLEECE 7-1 was initiated in Quang Ngai Province (Para. 5). Search-and-destroy Operation FRESNO ended yesterday in Quang Ngai Province with a total of 83 Communist troops killed (Para. 6).

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[REDACTED] According to recently captured enemy documents a Viet Cong unit has been formed to attack allied shipping (Paras. 10-11).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Premier Ky discusses several topics on 17 September, including the revelation that his government is reconsidering whether to grant the Constituent Assembly legislative status (Paras. 1-4). Thich Tri Quang again denounces the Thieu-Ky government and US policy in South Vietnam at the conclusion of his 100-day hunger strike (Paras. 5-7). Moderate Buddhist leader, Thich Tam Chau, returns to Saigon after an extended sojourn in Vung Tau (Paras. 8-10).

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III. North Vietnamese Military Developments:
Three US aircraft were lost over North Vietnam yesterday (Paras. 1-3). Three US Air Force aircraft encountered three MIG aircraft today, but no shots were fired (Para. 4).

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A North Vietnamese newspaper article describes difficulties involved in the transport of missiles and associated equipment throughout the country (Para. 9).

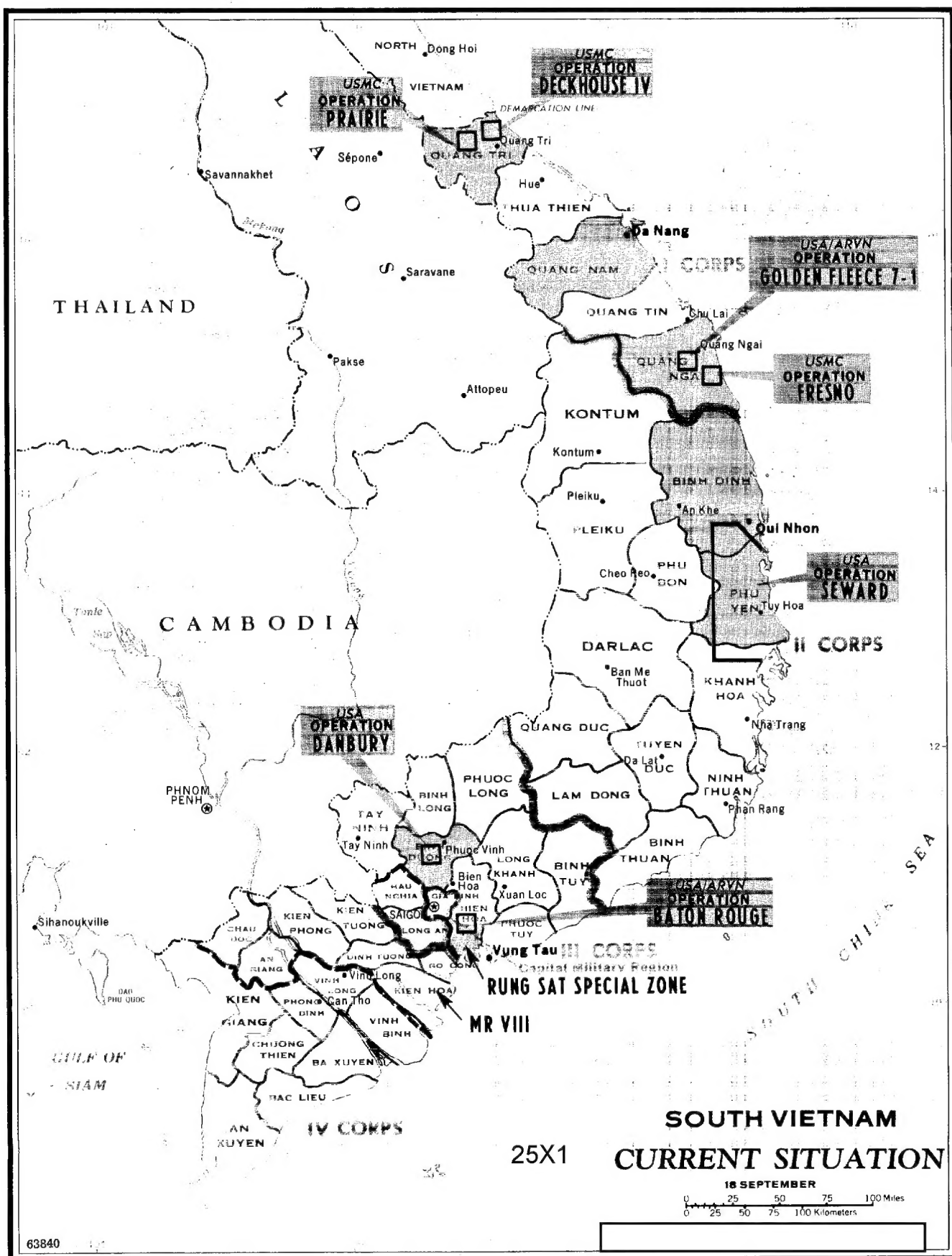
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V. Communist Political Developments: DRV representative in Paris Mai Van Bo repeated Hanoi's standard hard line on negotiations and asserted that Hanoi had envisioned a greatly expanded US presence in the war (Para. 1). An interview with captured US pilots in Hanoi broadcast on 17 September provided a means for Hanoi to respond negatively to US soundings on prisoner exchange (Para. 2).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. US Marines participating in Operations PRAIRIE and DECK HOUSE IV in northernmost Quang Tri Province reported contact with Communist forces over the weekend. Official casualty figures for the past 48 hours show 24 Americans were killed and 45 wounded while 31 enemy soldiers were killed. Press reports indicate that casualty figures may run much higher for the Communists, with 96 reported killed and as many as 200 more probably killed. A total of 1,001 tactical air strikes have been flown in support of Operation PRAIRIE. This is the fourth operation to exceed the 1,000 strike figure since US air support of ground forces began in South Vietnam.

2. Elements of the US 1st Infantry Division reported killing 12 Viet Cong and sinking two sampans as Operation BATON ROUGE continues in an area about 23 miles southeast of Saigon. This operation, which began on 3 September, is designed to flush out Communist units harassing the sea to Saigon shipping channels. Casualty figures for BATON ROUGE to date include two Americans killed and ten wounded while Viet Cong losses include 38 killed and one captured.

3. Elements of a US Army company participating in multibattalion search-and-destroy Operation SEWARD in coastal Phu Yen Province were attacked yesterday by an estimated battalion-size Communist force. During the intensive, one-hour action the enemy force employed mortars and small arms against the US unit which was in bivouac about 44 miles south of Qui Nhon. Ten Americans were reported killed and 12 wounded. Enemy losses included four killed and two weapons captured.

4. Operation DANBURY, a search-and-destroy operation with two battalions of the 1st Infantry Division participating, began on 16 September in an area of Binh Duong Province about 30 miles north of Saigon. No specific enemy units are known to

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be operating in this area. Seven Americans have been reported wounded so far. An enemy food storage area was discovered containing six tons of rice.

5. Operation GOLDEN FLEECE 7-1, a combined US Marine - South Vietnamese Army search-and-destroy operation in the rice harvest area 14 miles south of the town of Quang Ngai, began yesterday. A possible secondary mission of the unit may be to secure harvest activity in the operational area. Three Communist battalions with a total strength of 1,200 men is reported to be in the area.

6. Operation FRESNO, a search-and-destroy operation conducted in the coastal flatlands of Quang Ngai Province by one battalion of US Marines, was terminated yesterday. Final casualty figures show 26 Marines wounded and one ARVN soldier killed and two wounded. A total of 83 Communists were killed in this operation which began on 7 September.

7. On 16 September in Quang Nam Province, about seven miles south of Da Nang, a South Vietnamese Army company position was hit with a barrage of about 100 rounds of 82-mm. mortar fire. US Marine artillery supported a South Vietnamese reaction force which went into the area. A total of 11 friendly soldiers were killed and 14 wounded. Enemy losses are unknown.

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Viet Cong Unit Organized to Attack Allied Shipping

10. Preliminary screening of Communist documents captured by US forces on 3 September in the Rung Sat Special Zone (RSSZ) reveals the presence of a company-size Viet Cong unit with the primary mission of attacking allied shipping. The strength of this unit on 3 August was 55 men and it was equipped with antitank rifles, B-40 rocket launchers, and 57-mm. recoilless rifles. The documents state that this unit sank a US cargo vessel on 23 August --possibly the Baton Rouge Victory which was attacked and grounded on the Long Tau River on that date.

11. Initial analysis of these documents also suggests that this unit is directly subordinate to the Viet Cong Military Region VIII and not subordinate to the 225th Viet Cong Engineer Battalion which is a confirmed unit with an accepted strength of 400 in the RSSZ.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Premier Ky, in a 17 September address before members of the Saigon press corps, reiterated his pledge to speed the transition of his military government to a popularly based civilian regime. He further stated that his government is reconsidering whether to grant the newly elected Constituent Assembly--now charged only with drafting a new constitution--legislative status. Some of the newly elected members of the assembly have been quietly pressing to make it into a lawmaking body.

2. However, Ky went on to say that his government would continue to maintain the power of veto over actions of the Constituent Assembly. He declared, "we cannot take too many risks" and that the safeguard of the veto powers granted the government must remain in force for the present. It is not clear from Ky's remarks whether the military government would retain its veto power if the Constituent Assembly was to be transformed into a legislative entity.

3. Speaking of the general military situation, Ky stated that an invasion of the North was not necessary to win the war. He maintained infiltration from the North could be stopped by creating effective military control in the South. One of the necessary factors to achieve this secure condition would be enough troops. This may be an oblique call by Ky for more US troops in South Vietnam.

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4. Ky also discussed the fate of political prisoners now held by the government, some of whom have been in jail since the fall of Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963. He stated that a special commission would soon be established--within two or three weeks--to review all cases. However, he did not elaborate on just what the powers of this commission would be. This action may go a long way toward mollifying some of the more militant Buddhist oppositionists who have decreed the "hundreds" of prisoners taken by the government when they broke up the Buddhist "struggle" movement last spring.

5. In an open letter, issued on 17 September, explaining why he stopped his 100-day hunger strike, Thich Tri Quang once again went on record as an opponent of the present military government and US policy in South Vietnam. Stating that he started his hunger strike as a protest to the policy of the US President in supporting the Thieu-Ky government, he went on to accuse the US of wanting to eliminate the Buddhists from the national assembly that they had fought to get.

6. Tri Quang declared that it was the intention of US policy "to set up a regime shaped to the formula that they have created in South Korea in the past years, that means a Diem regime without a Diem." He further accuses the US of plotting to divide the Buddhists, and that this policy has as its end the killing off of Buddhist leaders.

7. The embassy in Saigon comments that the Tri Quang objective is still to bring down the government. Commenting further, the embassy feels Tri Quang has apparently lost much prestige among Buddhists already, and that his so-called "fast to the death" has failed to achieve any of his objectives and will only further reduce his stature among the Vietnamese people.

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8. The more moderate Buddhist leader, Thich Tam Chau, returned on 16 September from an extended stay in Vung Tau, presumably to once again take over active directorship of the Buddhist Institute which has been in the hands of more militant elements of the Buddhist hierarchy. Before departing Vung Tau he indicated [redacted]

[redacted] that he was extremely pleased with the results of the 11 September elections and that he had never been in favor of a Buddhist boycott of the election which had been advocated by the Buddhist Institute.

9. Chau stated he would not call for an extraordinary congress of the United Buddhist Association (UBA) or resign from the Institute until he has made an effort to resolve problems which are now facing the Institute. He apparently intends to confer immediately with Buddhist and government leaders seeking reconciliation of their present differences.

10. Tam Chau has shown himself more moderate in dealing with differences between the Buddhists and the government. How successful he will be in his present venture will depend in no small part on the amount of support that he will be able to get from the militant element of the Buddhist Institute.

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III. NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. Three US aircraft were lost over North Vietnam during the weekend. A US Air Force F-105D was downed approximately 48 miles north of Hai-phong while on an armed reconnaissance mission on 17 September. The cause of the loss is unknown and a search-and-rescue operation was not attempted due to the location of the downed aircraft.

2. Also on 17 September, another US Air Force F-105D was hit while on a mission northeast of Hanoi. The pilot was able to fly the plane to friendly waters and ejected when the plane flamed out about 40 miles north of Da Nang. The pilot was recovered in good condition.

3. A US Navy A-4C was hit by automatic weapons fire about 30 miles northeast of Thanh Hoa yesterday. The pilot ejected 14 miles off the coast, about 50 miles northeast of Thanh Hoa, after losing control of the aircraft. A US Navy helicopter picked up the pilot in good condition.

4. A flight of US Air Force F-105D aircraft encountered three MIG-17 aircraft about 70 miles northeast of Hanoi early this morning. When the US aircraft attempted to chase the enemy aircraft, they split up and flew off in different directions. No ordnance was expended by either the US or Communist aircraft during the encounter.

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Difficulties Encountered in the Movement of SAM Equipment

9. A North Vietnamese party newspaper, in an article highlighting the anniversary of the first downing of a US aircraft over North Vietnam by a SAM, described the difficulties involved in the movement of missiles and associated equipment throughout the country. This is the first reference to the mobile deployment of missiles and equipment noted in the North Vietnamese press. Among the difficulties cited in the article in moving the missiles were narrow bridges and rough roads. These conditions have long been thought to be behind the technical troubles plaguing North Vietnamese missile crews and may have been responsible for many of the missile failures.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. In an interview with leftist journalists on 15 September in Paris, DRV representative Mai Van Bo reiterated Hanoi's standard hard line on negotiations--they could come about only after the US stopped bombing North Vietnam and then only if the Liberation Front were included. Bo denied that De Gaulle's recent talks with DRV delegates in Phnom Penh were substantive. He asserted that Hanoi had envisioned an increased US effort in Vietnam, including the employment of up to one million US troops in the war and confidently repeated Hanoi's stated belief that the US would eventually withdraw.

2. On 17 September the North Vietnamese used an interview with captured US pilots Campbell and Kasler to respond negatively to US soundings on the chances for limited prisoner exchange. In an interview with the US pilots conducted "recently" by a French journalist in Hanoi and broadcast in English, USAF Lieutenant Campbell was quoted as saying that any reunion with his family "is pretty impossible unless this war ends." Campbell also reportedly recited Hanoi's usual line that US bombing of North Vietnam merely hardened North Vietnamese resolve.

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